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Angola to free pilot to Leland as 'gesture'

LISBON, Portugal (UPI) — Angola will release an American pilot shot down more than two months ago to U.S. Rep. Mickey Leland, D-Texas, a member of a visiting U.S. congressional delegation, the African country's official news agency said Saturday.

The ANGOP agency, in a dispatch received in Lisbon, said Joseph F. Longo, of Greensburg, Pa., will be freed Sunday "as a gesture of good will" in Luanda, the capital of Marxist-ruled Angola.

The agency did not repeat accu-

sations that Longo was "spying" for South Africa when Angolan MiG jets shot down his single-engine Beechcraft-Bonanza over southern Cunene province April 21. U.S. officials said Longo was ferrying the plane from the United States to a customer in South Africa when he was downed in south Angola, where the Cuban-backed government is battling South African and anti-communist UNITA rebel forces.

The news agency said Longo would be handed over to a three-

man congressional delegation that is to arrive in Luanda today for a visit that includes a reception with Foreign Minister Afonso "M'Binda" Van-Dunem.

The delegation is composed of Leland of Houston, Howard Wolpe of Michigan and John Murtha of Pennsylvania, all Democrats.

ANGOP said the congressmen would present Longo "to his family in the presence of Jesse Jackson" when they return to the United States Tuesday.

Washington, which has no diplomatic relations with oil-producing Angola, recently joined South Africa in providing arms to Jonas Savimbi's UNITA insurgents in their 13-year-old war against Luanda and its 37,000-man Cuban force.

Chester Crocker, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs, is expected to go to Luanda next month to revive talks over a Cuban withdrawal from Angola in exchange for South Africa's granting independence to the neighboring territory of Namibia.

Leland on mission for freedom Seeks release of captured American

By KATHY KIELY
Post Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Rep. Mickey Leland is taking a quickie weekend trip — to Angola.

The Houston Democrat is leaving today with a small congressional delegation that hopes to spring an American prisoner from the southern African nation.

The congressmen expects to return Monday with Joseph Longo, a 33-year-old Pennsylvanian who has been imprisoned since April, when he was forced down after apparently straying over Angolan airspace.

Longo, an employee of a Kansas-based firm called Pilot International, was ferrying a small airplane to a South African customer at the time.

Ever since, Leland said, he and other congressmen have been using personal contacts with Angolan leaders to try to negotiate Longo's release.

The United States maintains no diplomatic relations with Angola's Marxist government and has provided some military assistance to a guerrilla group called



LELAND:
In delegation

UNITA which is trying to oust the regime.

Leland and his allies took an interest in the Longo case because they are interested in seeing an improvement in relations between the United States and the Angolan government. They are not supporters of UNITA because, among other things, one of the guerrilla group's backers is South Africa.

Leland said he urged the Angolans to release Longo, whom they had suspected of spying, to improve their image in Washington.

The congressman, who has traveled frequently to Africa, made his case to an official Angolan delegation that visited Washington recently. "We really pressed them hard when they were here," he said, "and that's when they kind of promised to let him go."

State Department officials say they believe Longo to be in good health. They said the Italian ambassador informed them that the Angolans will release him soon.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, the Democratic presidential candidate, also has claimed some credit in helping to negotiate Longo's release.

It seems it will be Leland, however, who will have the pleasure of delivering Longo home.

Traveling with Leland on the trip are Rep. Howard Wolpe, D-Mich., chairman of the House subcommittee on Africa; Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., the congressman who represents the district where Longo lives, and aides representing Pennsylvania's Republican Sens. John Heinz and Arlen Specter.